



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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Forecast call for particulate matter levels unhealthy for sensitive people in Baton Rouge, New Orleans

BATON ROUGE – The Department of Environmental Quality is issuing an air quality alert for New Orleans and Baton Rouge for particulate matter for today, Sept. 1. Although the highest readings at monitors throughout the area this morning are not yet at the orange level on the Air Quality Index, forecasts have it reaching this level at some point later today. Orange on the AQI means unhealthy of sensitive people and it is at this level when an alert is triggered.

Sensitive people, children and the elderly should limit prolonged activity at this level, which is orange on the Air Quality Index. Because a marsh fire continues to burn in the Bayou Sauvage area of eastern New Orleans, particulate matter levels in southeast Louisiana could fluctuate between moderate (yellow on the AQI), and unhealthy (red on the AQI) depending on weather conditions.

“DEQ scientists continue to monitor the air quality with its stationary monitors throughout the area and with DEQ’s Mobile Air Monitoring Laboratory near the site of the fire,” said DEQ Secretary Peggy Hatch. “DEQ will issue air quality alerts as needed and work with partner agencies to provide information. People who are affected by the smoke should take steps to minimize exertion in a smoky environment. Now would be a good time to sign up to receive air quality alerts through our enviroflash alert system which is available at the DEQ Web site. Air quality information can be sent to your computer or texted to your phone.”

To sign up for air quality alerts, go to www.deq.louisiana.gov/enviroflash

Particulate matter consists of very small, fine particles that in the air can cause or aggravate a number of health problems. People with asthma, allergies and other respiratory conditions to avoid being outside for long periods of time. Other individuals should avoid exertion and prolonged activity outdoors when smoke is present. Seek medical care if you experience difficulty breathing or health-related issues.

The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals suggest, in general, individuals with asthma, allergies, and other respiratory conditions should avoid prolonged exposure to the smell and continue to follow their treatment plans as determined by their health care providers. If they become ill, they should seek medical advice from their health care provider. Individuals bothered by the smell should go indoors to minimize exposure. Run an air conditioner or central air conditioning system if you have one. If the air conditioner provides a fresh air option, keep the fresh-air intake closed to prevent smoke from getting inside. Also, set your vehicle's air conditioning systems to recirculate air.

DHH created a fact sheet on smoke, air quality and health for the public. The fact sheet provides information on things the public can do to minimize exposure and health impact. It is available at www.deq.louisiana.gov and www.dhh.la.gov

Particles in the air can cause or aggravate a number of health problems. Particles of concern include both very small, “fine” particles (that can only be seen through an electron microscope) and somewhat larger “coarse” dust particles.

Very small particles with diameters less than 2.5 micrometers are called “fine particles.” They are produced any time fuels such as coal, oil, diesel or wood are burned.

The marsh fire, which is in an isolated area, is burning subsurface and is inaccessible by land. DEQ continues to monitor the air from its fixed monitoring sites and with the Mobile Air Monitoring Laboratory, which is stationed close to the fire. Air Quality alerts will be issued as needed.

For information about air quality and for air quality forecasts, go to <http://www.deq.louisiana.gov/portal/tabid/2505/Default.aspx>

To learn more about the air quality index, go to: www.airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=aqibasics.aqi